

‘Compromise’ should not be a dirty word

Near and far, it’s important to move the ball forward

You don’t to look far to find evidence that we have lost out ability to compromise. Whether it’s the Joseph City Council or the U.S. House of Representatives, finding common ground has become uncommonly uncommon.

What we have instead is both sides of any particular issue lining up on their respective 10-yard lines and yelling epithets across the playing field at each other. It leaves all participants looking like spoiled children throwing a fit. It’s not a pretty picture.

Compromising in the public realm has a long and vaunted tradition in the United States. It was back in 1787 that “The Great Compromise” was reached. If you recall your history, you remember that was an agreement that large and small states reached during the Constitutional Convention that in part defined the legislative structure and representation that each state would have under the United States Constitution.

Small states and large states each had their plan and fought fiercely. When the debate concluded, a compromise was reached, and that agreement remains as part of our Constitution.

Unfortunately, were the issue to arise in today’s political environment, the fight would be ongoing 200 years later and there wouldn’t be a bicameral Congress. We’d still be a loose confederation of states with each side blaming the other.

In more recent history, there have been any number of examples of both sides of the political aisle coming together to accomplish great things.

Recall the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, federal law that reformed welfare. The bill was a cornerstone of the Republican Contract with America, yet President Bill Clinton — a Democrat — signed it into law fulfilling his 1992 campaign promise to “end welfare as we have come to know it.”

The chances of that important piece of legislation being approved in today’s environment in Washington are slim to none ... probably closer to none.

That unwillingness to see both sides and seek middle ground occasionally invades government at the most local level. A Joseph City Council member recently opined that there was “no solution” to the truck parking issues in the 300 block of North Main.

There are always solutions. Sometimes they are more difficult to craft when the issues become personal, but there is always middle ground. The mark of a good leader is the ability to convince people that life is seldom all or nothing.

Consider the noisy and contentious discussion in Wallowa County about health care over the past month. Once again we hear those opposed to the American Health Care Act, recently approved by the U.S. House. It replaces the Affordable Care Act, or what has commonly been known as Obamacare.

Both sides are inclined to admit that neither plan solves the problem — access to high-quality health care for those who need it. But once again we have both sides shouting at each other and no one willing to stand on the 50-yard line.

Hopefully, the U.S. Senate will step into the role and craft something similar to “The Great Compromise” to move the issue forward. A lot of people are going to have to eat a lot of their words to back away from their positions, yet that’s what is going to be necessary. Would you like fries with that crow?

The next time you engage in a conversation on an issue, surprise everyone by giving your view and listening to all the other views ... and then ask, “so what is the compromise?” The discussion that follows should be interesting, to say the least.

EDITORIAL

Voice of the Chieftain

In Salem, both parties found way to support pay equity

Oregon is setting a national example for ensuring that employees are paid equally for performing equal work.

In doing so, Oregon also has shown how Democrats and Republicans can work together. And it happened because of the 2017 Legislature’s struggles on an unrelated issue — curbing the soaring costs of the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System.

House Bill 2005, known as the Oregon Equal Pay Act of 2017, outlaws wage discrimination on the basis of race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, age, veteran status and other protected classes. It allows different pay levels for equivalent work if the disparity is because of bona fide factors such as merit, seniority and quality of a person’s work.

And it bars employers from asking for job applicants’ salary history before offering a job. That matters because women often have been paid less in the past, and using salary history for a new job can perpetuate that disparity.

The bill, which Gov. Kate Brown plans to sign into law this week, combines enforcement and education. It encourages employers to examine the internal equity of their wages, provides them with legal protections for doing so, but expands penalties for employers who willfully discriminate. The bill initially was so divisive that it was approved in the state House in late March on a party-line vote after Republicans narrowly failed to substitute their own version. Yet the final version unanimously passed both the Senate and last week the House.

How could this be? It stems from good-hearted people being willing to listen, make compromises and not fall victim to ideology. Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, gives broad autonomy to his committee chairs instead of orders. He also

has a knack for pairing the right people to lead committees, which is where most of the Oregon Legislature’s work gets done.

Kathleen Taylor, a first-term Democratic senator from Milwaukie, and experienced Republican Sen. Tim Knopp, of Bend, did not know each other well before Courtney appointed them to the Senate Workforce Committee.

But chair Taylor and vice chair Knopp developed a collaborative trust and respect as they worked this year on PERS and other issues. Under the Legislature’s deadlines, they ran out of time to resolve PERS, which they shipped off to the legislative budget committee for more work.

Pay equity is a priority for Taylor, and Courtney asked Knopp to work with her on it. Republican Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena, a member of the Workforce Committee, said Taylor’s leadership and Knopp’s collaboration were crucial. Little by little, the committee reshaped the measure from a bad bill into a good bill.

The working relationship between Taylor and Knopp was personified by her giving the opening argument for the bill on the Senate floor and his giving the closing argument, Hansell said.

In the House, the bill had elicited considerable rancor. In the Senate, all sides got their say, as negotiations started by finding common ground. Senators talked with House members about their concerns. Misunderstandings and miscommunications were resolved. Blowups and hiccups happened, but no one was willing to walk away from the negotiating table.

Seeking perfect legislation can be the barrier to achieving good legislation. On the pay equity bill, business and labor — Republicans and Democrats — were largely satisfied that the final version was both effective and reasonable. Oregon can be proud of its equal-pay legislation. And equally proud of its legislators.

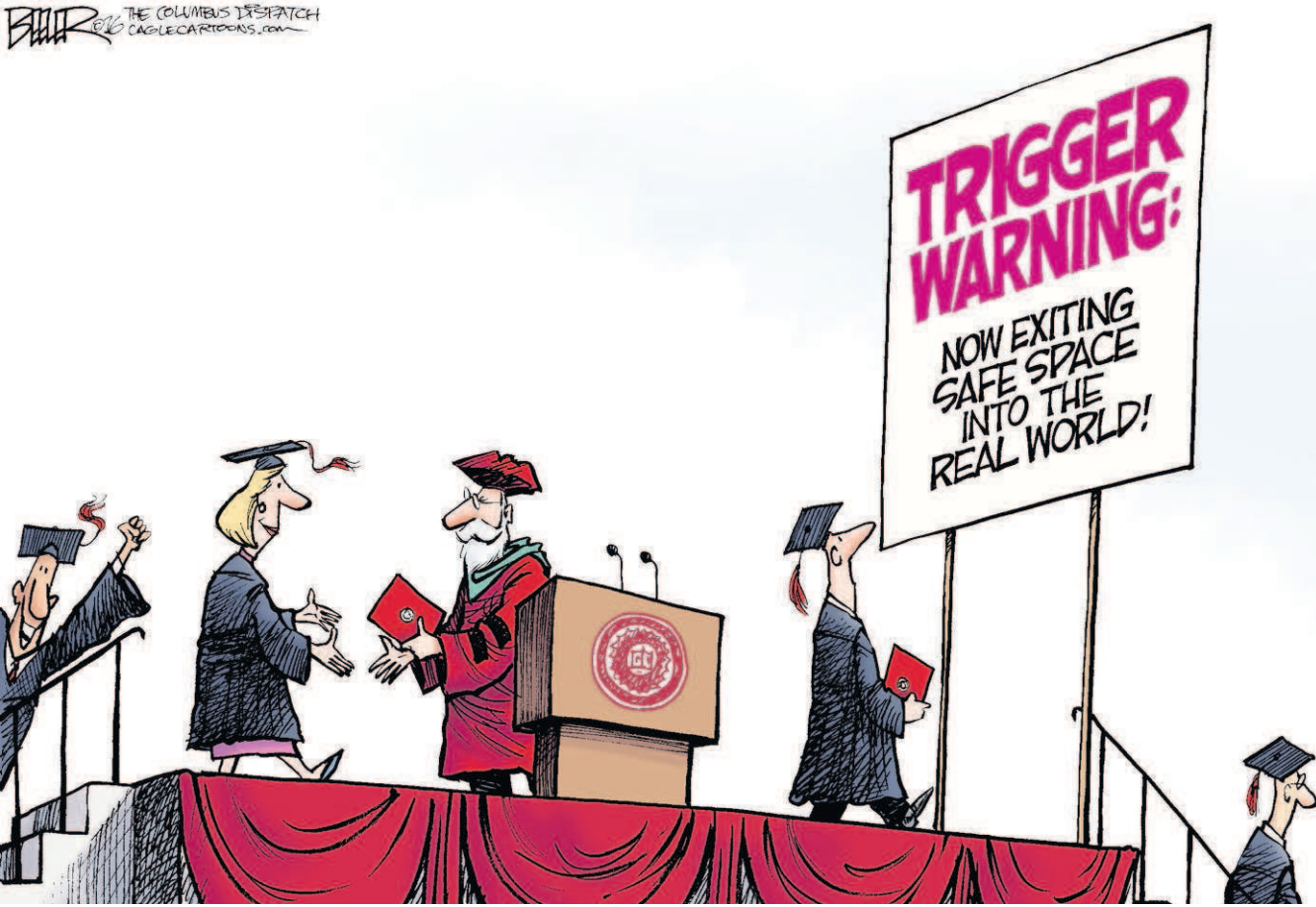
Unplug plan to sell transmission grid

Hidden in the budget proposed by the Trump administration is the sale of the Northwest transmission grid owned and operated by the Bonneville Power Administration. This is a terrible idea for the following reasons:

- Northwest ratepayers, you and me, have been paying for these transmission lines through our electricity bills. The sale of these lines by the federal government represents a theft of assets from citizens of the Northwest.
- The new owners of these transmission lines will expect a return on their investment resulting in higher electricity rates, which will result in higher utility bills for ratepayers, you and me.
- Rural areas, like Wallowa County, may be neglected, harming our community.
- Bonneville has an exemplary history of reliable service. Once profit becomes the motive of the transmission grid operator, will the Northwest still have this reliable service?

The sale of Bonneville’s transmission grid is another terrible idea from the Trump administration. Please write your senators or especially U.S. Rep. Greg Walden to let them know how you feel.

Harold Black
Lostine



Volunteers aid cemetery renaissance



WAHL TO WALL
Paul Wahl

If you had the opportunity to visit the Enterprise Cemetery this past weekend, you should know that the stellar condition of the facility didn’t just happen.

There is a small army of people working as the Friends of the Enterprise Cemetery who have done an amazing job and deserve to be recognized.

The cemetery cleanup process this year — like everything else — was hampered by horrible weather. Fortunately it was scheduled over two weekends. Unfortunately, all the work had to be done in one weekend.

Sondra Lozier was good enough to help me with background on the friends group and the cemetery board and their accomplishments.

“We have come so far in the past two-and-a-half years considering from where we started,” Sondra said. “It is a very interesting story of volunteers coming together and getting the job done.”

Sondra provided more than a page of accomplishments — 42 to be exact.

One of the highlights is having the water reinstalled. It had been cut off for more than four years, which caused lawn, plants and trees to die and created an ideal environment for hundreds of ground squirrels that devastated the lawn and headstones.

The system was brought up to state specification and last fall, an underground irrigation system was added at a cost of \$141,000.



A \$3,500 grant from Pacific Power Foundation was used to improve the south roadway at the cemetery. Deer protection was added around small lilac bushes, the exterior of the cemetery’s shop building was improved, the plumbing in the restroom was repaired, tilting and topsted markers were set aright ... the list goes on.

Most of the work was done by volunteers under the leadership of Perry Davis, who has served as Sexton. He is also updating cemetery records.

Sondra told me the only paid person has been a part-time employee to help with mowing. “This project is one of those heartfelt success stories that a group of people with a vision and a plan were able to accomplish,” Sondra said.

The efforts are ongoing as the tax base doesn’t cover the cost of upkeep. Maintaining the grounds will require continued volunteer effort.

The cemetery volunteers are a great example of what can be accomplished by people dedicated to service to the community. There are many other such groups in Wallowa County. Doing for ourselves is part of the DNA of folks

here.

Their work is also inspiration for solving problems remaining to be tackled. I’m think of the idea of creating a library district. The process is not for the faint of heart. It will take a minimum of two years to get a district fully functional and a whole lot of convincing.

Are there people out there who are willing to be as committed to that idea as the group that has made such a tremendous impact at the cemetery? Let’s hope so.

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Save the date: June 8. We will be having a party here at the Chieftain, and you are cordially invited.

It’s a Meet the Editor Open House 9-11 a.m. The idea is come, eat cake and drink coffee, chat and have a good time. Even if you’ve already met me, please come and help celebrate the beginning of a new era.

You will be seeing reminders throughout the newspaper in coming editions, we will also be sending email invitations. Looking forward to seeing all of you there.

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